

Incredible, true accounts of

- Phone calls from the long-dead • Religious visions
- Lake and sea monsters • USOs (unidentified submarine objects)
- Organic matter falling from the sky • Winged people
- Spontaneous human combustion

# Unexplained Mysteries of the 20th Century

MORE THAN 85 EYEWITNESS PHOTOGRAPHS

JANET and COLIN BORD

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Here in one far-reaching, illustrated volume is an intriguing collection of unexplained phenomena and mysterious happenings. From spirits and poltergeists, eerie balls of light, and unaccounted-for objects dropping from the sky to USOs (unidentified submarine objects) and their occupants, this absorbing compendium documents hundreds of supernatural apparitions of the modern world.

With a country-by-country gazetteer, you'll encounter chilling accounts of objects that dematerialize in one place and rematerialize elsewhere, messages sent by spirits through computer terminals, and religious icons weeping tears chemically indistinguishable from human tears. Perhaps the strangest sightings are those of weird, inexplicable creatures—winged people, giant snakes, monsters from lakes and seas, and “little people” from Britain and Ireland.

Some of the questions you'll be left pondering include:

- What would cause a man just killed in an airplane accident to telephone his family to tell them he was okay?
- Why would a woman hitchhiker keep accepting rides at the very spot she was killed years before?
- How could a man in Oklahoma speak from his grave after having been buried for eighteen years?
- How could a person spontaneously burst into flames for no apparent reason?

*Unexplained Mysteries of the 20th Century* is a gripping catalog of the seen and unseen—a provocative guide to the seemingly impossible.

**Janet and Colin Bord's** books in the field of paranormal phenomena include *Mysterious Britain* and *The Secret Country*. They live in Great Britain.

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A Guide to Ancient Sites in Britain  
Alien Animals  
Bigfoot Casebook  
Earth Rites  
The Evidence for Bigfoot and Other Man-Beasts  
Sacred Waters  
Ancient Mysteries of Britain  
Modern Mysteries of Britain

# *Introduction and Acknowledgements*

Having written *Modern Mysteries of Britain* in 1986, we immediately embarked on this companion volume, *Unexplained Mysteries of the 20TH Century*, which covers the whole of the twentieth century up to mid-1988, and literally the whole of the world. Mysteries do not occur only in Western civilizations but also in remote parts like Siberia (USSR), the Congo (Africa) and Greenland, and 111 separate countries are represented in the Gazetteer. We have also included some British events which update *Modern Mysteries of Britain*.

As soon as we began writing this book we realized that the main problem we experienced when compiling its predecessor, namely an excess of material, was now even more pronounced. Consequently we have had to be selective in our choice of subject-matter, and have concentrated mainly on mysteries that are place-linked rather than those that are person-linked. This criterion is obviously not infallible, because some of the mysteries we have written about, like poltergeists and religious phenomena, perhaps others like UFO close encounters and ghostly voices, may on investigation also prove to be more closely linked to the person than to the place. But the line had to be drawn somewhere, and we have therefore tended to concentrate also on those mysteries which intrigue us most. As a result we have not covered subjects like telepathy and similar psychic phenomena, demonstrations of psychokinesis (e.g. metal-bending), reincarnation, out-of-body and near-death experiences, fire-walking, mediumship/spiritualism, clairvoyance, mysterious deaths and disappearances, Bermuda and other 'triangles', animal mysteries such as homing cats and dogs. That may seem a long list of excluded subjects, but our seventeen chapters cover others of equal or greater strangeness. Each chapter contains details of many cases, but we could not include them all. Extra cases will be found briefly described in the world-wide Gazetteer at the end of the book. Should



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any readers have similar first-hand experiences to report, they can contact us care of the publishers, Grafton Books, 8 Grafton Street, London W1X 3LA. We are also glad to hear from anyone with photographs relevant to the Fortean Picture Library, our pictorial archive of mysteries and strange phenomena.

A book such as this would be impossible to compile if there were not dedicated researchers around the world pursuing their own special interests and publishing the results of their researches. We admire and acknowledge the work of all the authors named in the Bibliography and Notes, but most especially William R. Corliss, whose *Sourcebook Project* is incomparable and invaluable, and Bob Rickard, who is recognized world-wide for his twenty years of single-minded devotion to the Fortean cause (study of strange phenomena). His magazine *Fortean Times* goes from strength to strength and is *essential* reading (for address see page 401); as are the books he is now publishing under his Fortean Tomes imprint. Other friends, colleagues and fellow researchers whom we wish to thank for their help are Anthony R. Brown (Scotland), Ray W. Boeche (USA), Bill Chalker (Australia), Loren Coleman (USA), COUD-I and members (USA), the late Tim Curry (USA), René Dahinden (Canada), Lucius Farish (USA), Cynthia Hind (Zimbabwe), Norman O. Josephsen (USA), Ulrich Magin (West Germany), Gary Mangiacopra (USA), Shin-ichiro Namiki (Japan), Scott Parker (USA), Stephen C. Pratt (England), Ronald Rosenblatt (USA), Anthony 'Doc' Shiels (England), Bob Skinner (England), Dennis Stacy (USA), Lars Thomas (Denmark), Pete Wayne (Scotland). Especial thanks for prompt assistance whenever needed are due to Dr Karl P. N. Shuker in the field of cryptozoology; and in the field of religious phenomena to Tristan Gray Hulse, who will one day write his own book . . .

# I *Things that go bump in the night . . .*

. . . are known as poltergeists by the parapsychologists. A rough literal translation of 'poltergeist' is 'noisy spirit' and noisy they certainly are, but whether or not spirits are involved is still very much open to question. Like other paranormal phenomena, there are records of poltergeists having been experienced for hundreds of years, and in all kinds of situations, from mud huts in Africa, to modern apartments in New York City; but unlike some other phenomena, which are only transitory and merely a curiosity, such as falls of frogs, a poltergeist is to most victims a terrifying experience, and they do everything they can think of to persuade the unwelcome visitor to leave. But it is rarely keen to go.

A poltergeist might first announce its presence by rapping or banging on the walls. This can be so loud that it is heard some distance away. At Fougères-sur-Bièvre in France, beginning in December 1913, strange noises were disturbing not only the Huguet-Prousteau family but the neighbouring houses too.

One evening the noise was so great that it was heard distinctly not only in the neighbouring houses, but across the road, over 60 yards away. The house was shaken from top to bottom, the partitions vibrated violently, the doors and windows rattled with singular vehemence. It was found necessary to open them for fear of their glass being broken. According to reliable witnesses, the noises accompanying the vibrations of the house resembled the reverberations of distant thunder. On the other hand, the curtains of the bed were in constant agitation, as if moved by a strong draught, though everything was shut.

Inside the house, several people unconnected with the family made some experiments. They struck a definite number of blows on the wall. Immediately a similar number would answer, but with peculiar sonorousness. The noises were loud and muffled,

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and seemed to emanate from the whole house.

One night some determined men went up to the garret. They had hardly got there when the noise commenced and the house began to tremble. Their lights were nearly extinguished, and the men hurried down again.<sup>1</sup>

In a more recent case, at Pinetown, Natal (South Africa), on New Year's Day 1984, fourteen-year-old Wendy Roos heard a loud noise: 'I thought the house was caving in. It sounded as if a large boulder had crashed on to the roof.' Nothing was found, nor was any damage done during other poltergeist disturbances before and after this event.<sup>2</sup>

Mysterious bangings in the house structure are annoying enough, but it can be equally nerve-racking to lie in bed at night listening to noises below, and suspecting you have intruders bent on all-out destruction. A Boer family living in Boshof (South Africa) in 1901 were woken at midnight by the sound of pots and pans being thrown around in the kitchen, and dishes being smashed. After a couple of minutes all was quiet again, and in the morning they were surprised to find nothing broken and everything in place. This happened for three nights, more severe each time, and with the noise of furniture being overturned and broken, but nothing was ever harmed.<sup>3</sup> This is not always the case, however. Poltergeists are usually destructive, and household goods do get smashed, and furniture broken. A destructive poltergeist outbreak was reported from Ireland in 1916, the victims being a farmer and his family. The farmer told a sergeant of the Royal Irish Constabulary:

Sergeant, I am in great trouble. I came to town today to arrange for the funeral of my youngest child. I am suffering terrible annoyance in my house night and day for almost a week. Some unseen spirit is wrecking my house, throwing cooking utensils about and breaking delf. It flung a bottle of ink over my dying child, hurled a heavy glass salt-cellar at a mirror in the sick-room and broke a valuable tea set of old china that my wife was carrying downstairs for safety. She was about half-way down the stairs with the china in her apron when the whole lot was completely smashed in my presence as well as in that of a few friends who had come to the wake. The day previous to the death of the child, myself and servants were churning in the kitchen, when the butter was taken from the churn and some of it thrown against the ceiling ten feet

*Things that go bump in the night . . .*

high. I found some of the broken china in my byre some thirty yards distant.

The sergeant went to visit the farm, having a certain degree of natural suspicion about the reported events. He sat in the kitchen with the farmer, his wife and daughter, and waited for some convincing activity on the part of the poltergeist.

Being an old warrior, I was still unsatisfied with what I saw, and I came to the conclusion in my own mind that if some one of the seven or eight fitches of bacon that were suspended near the ceiling, or if one of the two horse-collars which were hanging on pins in the wall over the fireplace should be thrown down, I should then be satisfied as to the reality of the spook; but I took care not to betray what was passing in my mind, either by look or otherwise, to anybody that were present.

. . . I stood up to go. The woman and children said they would not remain when I left, so they started for the back door – the servant first, followed by the two children, then the farmer's wife, next the farmer, and I bringing up the rear. I had got across the kitchen near the end of the obstructing wall, and was turning into the passage, but still in full view of the kitchen, when suddenly one of the horse-collars was flung from its position, high up on the wall, the whole length of the room, landing on the floor with a smack. The farmer turned, and after we had both examined the collar, he said: 'You must now believe'; to which I assented. We passed into the yard, going towards the road, when a graip (dung-fork) was thrown across the yard by unseen hands.

In the end, the farmer had a new dwelling built at some distance from the old.<sup>4</sup>

The events just described, with household goods being thrown around, are very typical of poltergeist activity, and are usually a sure sign that a poltergeist has taken up residence. The mere fact of items being moved around by no human agency is puzzling enough, but there are even stranger aspects to these happenings. Sometimes the objects moved are very heavy, and could not be lifted by one, two or even three hoaxers working together. In Pearisburg, Virginia (USA), in the home of an elderly widow, Mrs Beulah Wilson, and her nine-year-old foster-child, dishes were being smashed and furniture moved in a poltergeist outbreak beginning on 19 December

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1976. The police investigated, and Trooper Pritchett reported: 'The furniture was big . . . old-timey chairs . . . and the kitchen cabinets must have weighed 200 pounds or more. She and the boy and Cardwell couldn't have moved them . . . all pulling together.'<sup>5</sup> In a poltergeist outbreak in Ascot, Berkshire (England) in 1975 the family cars were sometimes moved as they stood parked outside. One of the cars was moved nightly for many weeks, as much as nine feet sideways, silently across gravel, with the doors locked and the handbrake on.<sup>6</sup>

Smaller objects, seen moving around inside a house, will sometimes appear to be travelling unnaturally slowly, and they also change direction and turn corners while in flight. Sometimes they have even been seen to pass through closed doors – not literally seen, because the actual transition of solid object through solid object was not observed by the witness, only the result of this happening. Some examples will clarify this. The Poona (India) poltergeist of 1927–30 was a particularly active and unusual one. One of the witnesses was Miss Kohn, who lived in the afflicted Ketkar household and kept a

*Guy Lyon Playfair was investigating a poltergeist outbreak in Ipiranga (Brazil) in 1973 when a stool slid downstairs, after having passed through a closed door.*



record in her diary of various happenings attributable to the poltergeist. On 19 July 1928 she wrote:

At 9.30 p.m. while D[amodar] was going to bed, some of his toys became active. My sister took care that the lid of his wooden toy-case was properly shut. D. and I got into bed, when a wooden wheel came pelting on to his bed, and he dodged it, as it went very near his head. (He is compelled to dispense with a mosquito net, owing to the furious nature of the occurrences last April, when stones and toys would appear inside his net just after he had been tucked safely in – the memory of these horrors has made him nervous of mosquito nets for the present.) The wheel was followed by a spinning-top.

I got 'fed-up' and fetched an enormous German dictionary weighing about five pounds. I placed this upon the toy-box, and got into bed again. Two minutes had not elapsed when another top (not the same one as before) came towards us, again out of the toy-box. I called my sister's attention to the heavy dictionary. She looked into the box to see what toys were there. After a moment, when she had just left the room, the same top as at first, came out as if to mock our vain imagining that a mere dictionary would prove an obstacle.<sup>7</sup>

A similar occurrence took place in Vachendorf (West Germany) in 1948. A refugee family from Bohemia was lodging in one room of an old mansion, and was there suffering from poltergeist activity. On this occasion, the two beds in the room were bombarded by stones, tools and other objects. The mother put the tools away in their box, closed it and sat on it. To her amazement, as she sat there she saw the tools reappear one by one in different parts of the room. On another occasion, her husband was hit on the head by a wooden shoe which came out of a closed glass cupboard.<sup>8</sup>

In the Nicklheim case (West Germany) of November 1968 to February 1969, objects which went missing indoors would later be seen falling outside, and one of the investigators decided to test this. He placed perfume bottles and pill bottles on the kitchen table, sent everyone outside, closed all doors and windows, and then joined the others. Soon a perfume bottle was seen, and then a pill bottle. They were first seen at roof level, as they moved earthwards in a zigzag motion.<sup>9</sup>

In many poltergeist cases, objects appear inside a closed room,



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first noticed at or just below ceiling height as they fall to the ground. In 1952 the mayor of Neudorf (West Germany) experienced a poltergeist outbreak at his home, and one day he, his son and daughter-in-law saw a number of nails appear about eight inches below the bedroom ceiling and fall to the floor. They came from a locked cupboard in the kitchen. In the Poona case, a jar flew into Miss Kohn's bedroom which Damodar had taken to school two days before and had left there.<sup>10</sup> In a New York poltergeist outbreak in 1907-9 the witness reported:

On one occasion I was making my bed, and entirely alone on that floor of the house, when a penny dropped squarely in the middle of the bed, and a few minutes later another dropped at my feet.

To my certain knowledge there was not a penny in the house, as, shortly before that occurrence, I had searched everywhere for pennies to buy a stamp.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, though on a larger scale, coins fell before startled witnesses in Finland in 1917 or 1918. Two buttons fell first, then a coin, clicking on the parquet floor. Then more coins fell at five-, ten- or fifteen-minute intervals, and the two frightened students fetched more witnesses. As they watched, the coins kept pouring down. They placed them on the mantelpiece and left to spend the night elsewhere. Next day, the coins were still where they had placed them. The coins were found to be genuine and no one claimed them, so the lucky recipients went out to celebrate with friends at a restaurant.<sup>12</sup>

In these last two cases, the coins did not belong to anyone in the household and were genuine apports, similar to the objects that mediums would cause to materialize in their spiritualist seances earlier this century. From what the witnesses say, it is clear that objects which appear in closed rooms, or leave locked boxes, somehow dematerialize and then rematerialize. We are certainly now way beyond the boundaries of the scientifically acceptable, but we are not there solely on the evidence of one hysterical witness. Many people have *seen* objects suddenly appear and disappear in empty space. Miss Kohn, careful witness in the Poona case, wrote in her diary for 26 July 1928 of how she and Damodar were sitting in her room in the evening with heads close together watching a wick burning in a small bowl.

All of a sudden, quite quietly a round glass button (which belongs

*Things that go bump in the night . . .*

to an old set in our possession) was dropped deliberately into the small bowl (*wati*) in which the wick was burning. It did not fall from a height, but appeared only one inch above the edge of the *wati*, i.e. the 'spirit' must have been hovering quite near to our very faces, to produce this act.<sup>13</sup>

During the infestation by the Lieserbrücke poltergeist (Austria) in 1922, the Kogelnik family experienced many unusual happenings, and once Mrs Kogelnik saw an axe disappear, in good light in the late morning.<sup>14</sup>

However unlikely the materialization and dematerialization of inanimate objects might seem to be, at first sight the dematerialization of living people seems impossible. But this too has been reported, certainly not frequently but more than once. It happened several times in the Poona case, when young boys were teleported from one location to another. Damodar was more than once taken into the car which was in a shed, and at least once the shed was closed, so that he had to open it from the inside in order to get out. His elder brother was also teleported, as witnessed by Miss Kohn's sister, who was an intelligent woman and a scholar. Here the event is described by Miss Kohn:

At 9.45 a.m. on April 23rd, my sister says in a letter, the elder boy 'suddenly materialized in front of me in your doorway like a rubber ball. He looked bright but amazed, and said "I have just come from Karjat". He didn't come through any door.' My sister describes the posture of the boy as having been most remarkable. When she looked up from her letter-writing, she saw him bending forward: both his hands were hanging away from his sides, and the hands hanging limp – his feet were not touching the floor, as she saw a distinct space between his feet and the threshold. It was precisely the posture of a person who has been gripped round the waist and carried, and therefore makes no effort but is gently dropped at his destination.<sup>15</sup>

It is difficult to explain why teleportation should happen, but at least we must be thankful that the poltergeists do return the people they so mysteriously spirit away. (But perhaps they sometimes don't . . . maybe some of the people who disappear without trace have been teleported into a limbo and left there, forgotten by some absent-minded poltergeist . . .)

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If we continue to view the poltergeist as alive in some way, it is possible to see other evidence for a sort of human intelligence. Mrs Kogelnik was one person who experienced the poltergeist's particularly unfriendly nature (Lieserbrücke, Austria, 1922). You might think that breaking china and causing household chaos was bad enough, but poltergeists can also be downright spiteful. Mrs Kogelnik tried hard to carry on despite the poltergeist's activity, but it must have been difficult. As her husband, Commander Kogelnik, wrote:

I must now relate that for a fortnight I had been unable to find an inkstand, which always stood on my desk. All search for it had been in vain . . . Whilst my wife was up under the roof, and Hannie close by her was engaged in cleaning and sweeping, suddenly there was a whistling sound from the further end of the large space where no one had been standing. Then came a crash, and the inkstand fell at my wife's feet, shattered to fragments, the ink it had contained running about over the floor. Shortly afterwards, pieces of coal were thrown, and as my wife and Hannie were not daunted, but continued their sweeping, an old, unused flower-pot came hurtling through the air from a corner in which it had long rested, the earth with which it had been filled being sprinkled over the newly-swept part of the floor. After this the work of cleaning was stopped . . .<sup>16</sup>

However, some poltergeists seem to have a sense of humour, too. A Birmingham (England) family was terrorized by a poltergeist in 1974, but it seems the 'spirit' was enjoying playing games with them. The wife said: 'It's nerve-racking living here. I have to keep my purse and pills on me. If I don't, the poltergeist hides them!' Her husband added: 'He loves to have fun with my underwear. He throws them downstairs, and if I don't pick them up he creates chaos in the kitchen. Once I had a bath and asked my wife to get my pants but she couldn't find them. The next morning I was astonished to see them hanging on a branch at the top of a tree at the back of the house.'<sup>17</sup> During the Vodable (France) poltergeist outbreak in 1914, a bust of the former owner of a big house was found tucked up in bed, its head on the pillow and the bedclothes pulled up round its chin. Later it was found in another bed.<sup>18</sup> In Newark, New Jersey (USA), where William Roll was investigating a poltergeist outbreak in September 1961, he told the family 'It doesn't hit people', and was